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# **Gay and lesbian emotional geographies of clubbing: reflections from Paris and Turin**

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# **Gay and lesbian emotional geographies of clubbing: reflections from Paris and Turin**

## **Abstract**

Urban nighttime entertainment spaces, including bars, pubs and clubs, are a crucial space for the performance of gendered social relations and the experience of sexual identities. This article investigates the emotional spaces of commercial gay and lesbian recreation in two different settings: lesbian nights in Paris, France, and gay clubs in Turin, Italy. This research was carried out through direct observation and auto-ethnographic fieldwork. Drawing on the literature from emotional geographies, the article proposes an alternative take on the geography of gay and lesbian clubbing by applying the metaphors of the island and the archipelago from cultural geography to the gay and lesbian scene. The island and archipelago are presented as metaphors that imply emotions, performance, materiality, spatiality, strategy and imagination in the performance of the gay and lesbian playscape. The article argues that the club, intended as a type of gay and lesbian island, does not necessarily imply a condition of insulation. Rather, the island implies both metaphor and materiality, and movement may also be considered an emotional strategy for gays and lesbians in the heteronormative urban space.

**Keywords:** gay and lesbian clubbing; emotions; island; archipelago; Paris; Turin

## **1. Introduction**

Using the theoretical lens of emotional geographies, this article focuses on urban gay and lesbian nighttime entertainment places; that is, clubs, bars, and public-private venues where adults perform recreational activities such as meeting, drinking, chatting, and dancing. The aim of this article is to discuss how an approach informed by emotional geographies offers new perspectives on the spatialities of gay clubbing, which differs from previous approaches

that have tended to frame gay and lesbian clubs as closed and insulated ‘islands’ in the heteronormative space. This article argues that the emotional space of clubbing is a porous space in which boundaries extend beyond the materiality of bars and clubs. It is a space constituted by movement and by emergent and contingent agglomerations of emotions, expectations and desires, all of which play a role in the everyday life of many gays and lesbians.

The research focuses on lesbian clubs in Paris, and gay and lesbian clubs in Turin. Regarding Turin, gay clubs target a wide scope of the queer public, but de facto clubs are mainly populated by gay men. In Paris, the spaces we studies are strictly intended and labeled ‘for lesbians’, though other women with non-normative sexualities may arguably access these spaces. The article focuses explicitly on gay and lesbian clubbers, and will not therefore consider the variety of queer sexual identities involved in clubbing experiences in the two cities.

As discussed in the literature, urban gay and lesbian recreational spaces are relevant to the experience of sexuality because such spaces provide a chance to spend time among people who share similar sexualities in a hybrid public-private space without heterosexual surveillance (Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Matejskova, 2007; Thomson, 2007). The nocturnal recreational time-space is also generally characterized by a larger degree of freedom, relative to daytime spaces, and by a partial exception from common social rules and constraints (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hubbard, 2005; Hutton, 2006). On the one hand, the space of the club reproduces some of the traits of city life, such as anonymity, density and spatial closeness; on the other hand, it offers a subversion to those urban traits, for example, by allowing emphasized sociabilities (i.e., dancing, touching). Additionally, the club time-space allows for the experimentation of alternative temporary nighttime identities that are different from those based on daytime professional, economic, and cultural statuses (Bottà, 2010; cf. Valentine and Skelton, 2003 and the idea of ‘multiple sexual identities’).

Clubbing is a socially constructed and performed activity, as well as a series of fragmented, temporal experiences and emotions (Böse, 2005; Northcote, 2006), with a particularly relevant role in gendered performances (Gelder, 2007; Waitt, Jessop and Gorman-Murray, 2011; Tan, 2012). Many researchers have considered the different perceptions of fun, amusement, annoyance and fear in the eyes of different audiences (e.g., Hutton, 2006; Boyd, 2010). For example, given the abundance of heteronormative settings in the performance of night-clubbing, the straight 'scene' may be perceived as not fun, or even violent, in the eyes of sexually marginalized subjects (Moran et al., 2003; Casey, 2004; Matejskova, 2007; cf. Blanch, 2012). Various authors emphasize how the experience of clubbing in spaces perceived as protected, safe, and loose may be quite relaxing and pleasurable (Hutton, 2006; Boyd, 2010); at the same time, such spaces may have drawbacks, such as the pressure to conform to dominant identities and dress codes, diffused consumption of alcohol and drugs, and exclusion from clubs for marginalized or poor subjects (Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Hutton, 2006).

Nocturnal nighttime is investigated in the article with a focus on emotional geographies. As discussed in the next section, space is saturated with moving and ever-changing emotions, such as love, amusement or fear. In addition, the source of emotions very often comes from somewhere outside of the body, such as the settings, contexts, and places where relations occur (Pile, 2010). This article focuses on an 'emotional space', referring to the fragmented spatialities of emotions and the space of clubs and recreational venues, functioning as the spatial field where nocturnal emotional contact between bodies occurs. The focus on the micro-scale of the club scene and its spatialities is in line with the provocation of Gorman-Murray (2007) who, in the framework of his investigations on residential mobilities, stressed the urgency for empirical investigations on the links between desire and movement for sexual dissidents. Though residential mobility differs meaningfully from clubbing mobility, both phenomena emphasize different aspects of the link between emotions (for

example, in terms of desire and expectation), and gays' and lesbians' strategies of movement.

To interpret and represent the spatialities of emotions within the recreational scene, this article mobilizes the geographical metaphor of the *island*. The island is a popular metaphor in discourses concerning gays and lesbians (González, 2008) and is often used to describe spaces of positive exception (e.g., in terms of security or friendliness) in the framework of wider, negative spaces. An example, among the many that are possible, may be the sentence 'Seattle is an island in its respect for gay rights'<sup>1</sup>. In this vein, gay and lesbian bars and clubs have been commonly intended and described as islands for gays and lesbians seeking shelter, relaxation or fun. As argued in this article, assuming the perspective of emotional geographies allows different takes on this issue. Particularly, this article argues that the geography of gay and lesbian clubbing is strictly connected, in both Paris and Turin, with the formation of archipelagos of repeated temporary areas of entertainment. It is also proposed that movement in the nocturnal 'playscape' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) may be intended not just for the sake of spatial mobility but also as a personal and emotional strategy with direct implications to issues of emotional and subjective formations (Knopp, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2007 and 2009). Put differently, the metaphor of the island cannot be based only on the idea of insulation, as for gays and lesbians, it reveals much about emotions, a sense of belonging, lifestyle and identity. To support this thesis, the spatial metaphors of the island and the archipelago are mobilized in a way that echoes Brown's work on the metaphor of the closet (2000, 2006). The island/archipelago is not presented as a mere linguistic trope or descriptive mean but rather as a metaphor implying emotions, performance, materiality, spatiality, strategy, and imagination.

The next section introduces theoretical reflections on the role of emotions in geography within the framework of gay and lesbian playscape and addresses the relations between emotions and the metaphors of the island and the archipelago. We then discuss the methodology and introduce the two case studies, after which we explore the research

outcomes concerning the emotions and spatialities of the club and develop the metaphor of the island. Finally, the concluding remarks focus on the identification of the island as metaphor and materiality, performed by strategies of movement in an archipelago of ephemeral emotional spaces.

## **2. Emotions, islands and the social construction of nighttime spaces**

The so-called ‘emotional turn’ in geography (Bondi et al., 2007) gained momentum with a seminal editorial paper by Anderson and Smith (2001) that stressed the importance of emotions such as pain, bereavement, elation, anger and love in shaping, constructing and living within the human world. Despite the growing number of contributions to the debate, emotional geographies is not characterized by a shared vocabulary of concepts or a common methodological approach, but rather from a plurality of theoretical and methodological perspectives. The geography of emotions is a stimulating and ongoing attempt to explore different ways to investigate and to conceptualize the relations between feelings, spaces and subjective positionalities. As discussed by Ahmed (2004), emotions shape the very surface of bodies, that is, how we are touched and influenced by what is near or takes shape through repetition of actions over time and through orientations toward and away from others. In this sense, emotions contribute to shaping what bodies can do (Lim, 2007). Because feeling is not only personal, emotions emerge between bodies of various types, human and trans-human (Conradson, 2007; Thrift, 2008). The self is therefore understood as a porous and relational concept that emerges, in part, through its relations with other people and events, whether these people and events are present here and now or located in the there and then (Conradson, 2007), in a way that is coherent with the classical performative perspective of Butler (1990). Emotions therefore contribute to drawing and operating the boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside, i.e., the ‘I’ and the ‘we’, through contact with others (cf. Valentine, 1993). Because emotions are pivotal in the construction of spatial identities, for

example, in terms of love, attachment, and fear (Knopp, 2004; Bondi, 2005; Duff, 2010), emotions also assume relevant political dimensions, as grasped by various feminist geographers (Thien, 2005; Mountz and Hyndman, 2006).

Applying emotional geography to the geography of gay and lesbian nocturnal recreation, it is possible to look at bars and clubs as places of contact, belonging, and meaning (Erni and Fung, 2010; Evers, 2010). Emotions constitute an intensity that transforms space in the very instance of creating a place through the dynamic and relational interaction and contact of places and bodies; in this case, emotions constitute the collective performance of clubbing (Duff, 2010). Emotional contact may take form on a number of geographical scales, meaning that the relation between distance and emotion is not linear (Valentine, 2006; Mountz and Hyndman, 2006). This article focuses on the micro-scales of the recreational spaces for gays and lesbians in Paris and Turin.

As mentioned, the space of the club may play an important role in the lives of gay and lesbian people because of the heteronormative institutions that dominate daily spaces. The nocturnal time-space may be relevant in terms of its provision of freedom of behavior and emotions, as well as its function as a type of exception from the rest of the emotional heteronormative urban space (cf. Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Boyd, 2010; Brown and Bakshi, 2011). In this sense, gay and lesbian clubs are commonly intended as islands in the heteronormative landscape.

In its most popular meaning, the geographical metaphor of the island emphasizes the idea of the club as a separated utopian or dystopian space (Edmond and Smith, 2003; Bousious, 2008). The island is often presented as a kind of geographical trope that represents the physical detachment from the mainland and allows for an entirely different set of emotions, perspectives, possibilities, identities, temporalities, and spatialities (Minca, 2009). The sea surrounding these islands keeps them separated from the everyday, allowing a radical imagined separation between the extraordinary and the banal, the unpredictable and the



obvious. According to Deleuze (2002), dreaming of islands implies pulling away and separating, as well as searching for a new identity, new encounters (or new isolations) and new starts. Given that the islands are separated by oceans of heteronormativity, gay and lesbian clubbers must move within a fluid geography of clubs to have fun. Movement is, therefore, a central part of the clubbing performance. But, as discussed in the next paragraph, assuming an emotional geographical perspective, the idea of a rigid separation between the space of the club/island and the rest of the heteronormative urban space is too simplified. It is not the case that the cultural geography literature on islandness, islandism and nesomania (i.e., the desire or obsession for islands) shows that the metaphor of the island is rich in meanings. For example, entire continents may be thought of as simple islands, showing that the distinction between terms is quite arbitrary; for instance, the sea might be an element of contact, rather than separation (Chambers, 2008). As noted by DeLoughrey (2007, p. 1), ‘the tidal rhythm of the sea generate islands, just as the flows of maritime trade and transoceanic diaspora recreate the world on islands’. Put differently, by subverting traditional cognitive mapping, the whole world may be imagined as a watery planet characterized by shared islandness. Assuming an alternative ontology of islandness, i.e. destabilizing the myth of island isolation and engaging the worldliness of islands, provides a new perspective on space. Such a take implies assuming a ‘transoceaning imaginary’ and conceiving of islands as geographical spaces embodying openness. The concept of the ‘repeating island’ introduced by Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1985) to describe the fractal explosion of the culture of the Caribbean across the globe (a consequence of the movement of people and goods) supports a positive and creative vision of movement, diaspora, settlement and resettlement. Most areas described as remote and isolated isles are archipelagoes with long maritime histories of interconnection. By working on the metaphor, it is possible to challenge the ‘space of representation’ of gay and lesbian emotions, that is, to open up new ways to contest fixed and bounded conceptions of the gay and lesbian playscape (cf. Jones, 2010).

### **3. Methodology**

Reflections on emotions and space were largely developed by Thrift (2008) specifically in his texts on geographies beyond representation. Emotions are formal evidence of what, in one's relations with others, speech cannot reveal; therefore, emotions are concealed by methods such as questionnaires that analyze how people talk about their emotions (Katz, 2000; Thrift, 2008). A variety of methodological approaches have been discussed in emotional geographies (Thien, 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Investigating emotions implies considering how researchers and the researched perform an attunement of bodies, subjects, and objects (Smith et al., 2009; Probyn, 2010). One of the main challenges of such an analysis has been to create an intimate relation with the object of analysis in a way that maintains interiority, idiosyncrasy, and emotions. In an attempt to observe the development of emotions inside and around the space of the clubs and to privilege closeness in the analysis, an immersive auto-ethnographic approach is used (Butz and Besio, 2009; Söderström, 2011). Extensive fieldwork was conducted in Paris and Turin from January 2011 to May 2011. This fieldwork, which was carried out with the help of new and old friends who were actively and affectively immersed in the local gay and lesbian scenes, paid particular attention to our own development of emotions and to the decoding and interpreting of our friends' emotional and affective dispositions in the field (Hubbard, 2005; Butz and Besio, 2009). The tactic of joining the performing of clubbing, e.g., moving and following the users from club to club and experiencing each scene, allowed the researchers to gather a rich and variegated source of materials. In addition, we gained an opportunity to elaborate on a theoretical vision and language 'from within', with an emphasis on the self-analysis of our own emotions (Pile, 2010; Jewkes, 2012).

Data from direct observation were not recorded during nightclubbing to avoid the

impression of supervision; instead, data were annotated later in notebooks. The informal chatting that developed during fieldwork aimed to investigate the clubbers' feelings about their performance of nightclubbing. Subjective notes reflecting the perceptions of the researchers (e.g., impressions of the persons being annoyed, amused, relaxed, surprised; see Wylie, 2005; Pile, 2010) were classified using labels and keywords.

The chosen methodology has evident limitations. First and foremost, despite the awareness of the non-representational nature of emotions, the empirical basis for the research is largely grounded on interviews and discussions with users, i.e., through verbal representations. Second, an excessive emphasis on auto-ethnography may easily lead to solipsism and non-replicable methodologies. Being aware of these limitations, this article proposes a theoretically oriented alternative conceptualization of the emotional space of clubs developed through the contact between the sensibility of the researchers and the performing of gay and lesbian clubbing. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that the main thesis of this article (i.e., that the emotional space of clubbing is composed of repeated, temporary and porous islands) is not strictly an outcome of the empirical materials because not one of the interviewed clubbers spoke directly of islands and heteronormativity. On the other hand, the thesis has been developed as a consequence of the researchers' direct exposure to the experiences and emotions described in the next pages, and the current methodology is therefore based on a delicate bridge between auto-ethnography and fieldwork, with particular attention paid to emotional formations.

Before and during fieldwork, extensive bibliographic research on newspaper articles, media representations, brochures, thematic websites, and clubbing magazines from the two cities was conducted, which provided important information concerning the relevant contexts. In-depth interviews were carried out with scholars and relevant actors in the gay and lesbian recreational scenes, particularly organizers and club managers (two in Paris, four in Turin). These interviews aimed to examine the feelings of these actors and their impressions

regarding the object of analysis and the research hypothesis. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and classified. The two researchers shared their research materials and the thematic storylines emerging from the classifications of the research materials through emails and face-to-face discussions.

It should be noted that Paris and Turin should not be considered elements of a strictly comparative methodology searching for similarities and differences between two mutually exclusive contents. As discussed in the next section, the two cities differ dramatically in terms of size, and spatial phenomena regarding gays and lesbians vary widely. In this article, following the proposals of Ward (2010) and Robinson (2011), the two cities have been assumed to be parts of a relational comparative approach, in which transnational examinations have been used in one site to formulate and test questions in the other. Thus, there was a mutual attempt to construct empirical observation and theory by thinking across different urban experiences.

#### **4. Gay and lesbian playscapes in Paris and Turin**

Paris, which has approximately 150 commercial establishments, ranks after London but before Berlin in the number of gay and lesbian businesses it contains (Leroy, 2005). Paris, and the Marais district in particular, has a long tradition in this respect, representing a type of idealized mythic space in the eyes of many gays and lesbians worldwide (cf. Moussawi, 2013). Today, there are eight lesbian bars and one lesbian nightclub operating continuously in Paris. However, a new type of lesbian party is flourishing, which consists of itinerant nights taking place in different parts of the city. Organizers emphasize the quality and the novelty of the venues in which the parties take place. One of them told us the following statement:

‘I believe in securing beautiful venues for women. The aim is for women to be proud of being in a nice place where they will be lavishly received’ (Paris, February 2011).

Such parties defy lesbian spatial and social invisibility by allowing lesbian appropriation, even if only in commercial spaces. The energy spent by the organizers to find new places and new contents with which to animate and label each event underlines the need to continuously sustain the emotional aspect of the night. According to interviews with managers, complex spatial logistics play a role in choosing specific locations. Being close to the Marais is often considered an advantage for the location of a party, as it is a central and attractive area that guarantees a degree of safety. However, the male hegemony on the Marais annoys many lesbian women (Cattan and Leroy, 2010). Personal visibility as a lesbian is not always desirable. In particular, the Marais attracts a variety of people, including families and tourists, which creates the risk that lesbians who are ‘in the closet’ may be spotted there. Thus, a location that is in-between, i.e., neither central to the Marais nor too far from it, is privileged. Consequently, women-only parties tend to take place ‘elsewhere’. Party organizers who want to attract lesbians who claim to be ‘outside the milieu’ take care to distance their image from the Marais. Rather than a rejection of the Marais, the distance taken by lesbian parties merely reflects an ability to penetrate a diversity of places throughout the city (Cattan and Clerval, 2011).

In contrast with Paris, Turin is a medium-sized city (with approximately 910,000 inhabitants in 2011) in Northwest Italy tied to car manufacturing. Given its industrial heritage, Turin is important for the Italian Left parties and is generally considered a progressive space in the field of Italian queer politics and culture. Concerning leisure spaces, Turin does not have specified gay and lesbian discos and clubs, only thematic nights (apart from three gay-friendly bars). Currently, mainstream gay, lesbian and queer events organized by different associations take place every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night, while minor events take form in ‘alternative’ spaces, such as autonomous spaces (*centri sociali*). The spatial presence of the gay commercial spaces is therefore limited to certain times and is dispersed throughout

the city. Moreover, all night places are gay- and hetero-friendly; therefore, they are open to different customers and have a dominant masculine presence. Turin derives a polycentric, hybrid, dynamic and nomadic geography, sharing many spatial logics with the Parisian lesbian scene. Gay events continuously move from one place to another (winter, for example, is quite different from summer), emphasizing the relational and contingent nature of territoriality. In this sense, it is difficult to imagine a sort of affection toward the materiality of the club. Rather, the emotional field of gay leisure is not strictly embedded in a stable space but is fluid and temporary.

Of course, the gendered spatial performances of gay men and lesbian women present meaningful differences. For example, as stressed by the literature (Castells, 1983; Binnie and Valentine, 1999), gay men are often considered more territorial (i.e., visible and connected to the appropriation of physical space) than lesbian women (a position often critiqued; see Cieri, 2003; Pritchard et al., 2002; Podmore, 2006; Thomson, 2007). In the case of Turin, most likely due to the limited size of the city and because of historical reasons (cf. Pini, 2011), the gay masculine recreational scene shares the same lack of stable territorialization that characterizes the Parisian lesbian scene. Gay venues in Turin and lesbian parties in Paris comprise therefore the same dimension of the roving and ephemeral.

## **5. The emotional spaces of the club**

### ***Being inside/outside: emotional attachment to place***

A club is a physical space bounded and separated from the outside by walls, doors, physical bodies (security staff) and other human and non-human elements, suggesting the idea of a rigid, dualistic division between the inside and the outside, in this case, between the space of privacy of the club and the public space of the street, which echoes the image of an island surrounded by the sea. This material and symbolical division between the inside and the outside is reinforced by a number of practices, performances and technologies. For example,

at various events observed in Turin, the general look of the entrance was imbued with an ironic and emotional sense of excess, caricature, and carnival (a trait of the queer-clubbing culture). Staff members dressed as Roman warriors, for instance, which intimated the idea of the entrance as a liminal threshold of transition and transgression. At one Parisian event, the organizers distributed colored bracelets to women who entered, which indicated whether or not the person was single, coupled, open to encounters, or did not want to be categorized (Figure 1). These examples put into perspective a type of rite of passage between the two imagined spheres of the inside and the outside. In the case of the Parisian event, by entering, each person must assume and display her (new) identity.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the bracelets represented her predisposition towards contact. At the same time, this predisposition preceded and exceeded the space of the club, coming from ‘the outside’ of the closed material and symbolic space of the club.

**[Insert Figure 1 here]**

Figure 1 – *Web advertising for a primanotte lesbian event*

Source: [www.parisforlesbians.com](http://www.parisforlesbians.com)

In these commercial spaces, the material division between ‘the island’ and ‘the sea’ is reinforced by the exclusionary power of money. For example, many clubs adopt cards to account for the clubbing performance (i.e., to determine how much to pay), contributing to the separation of the inside from the outside as the card and money are needed to participate. Moreover, exclusion and inclusion are defined not only by money but also, for example, by social networks. In Paris, itinerant parties are advertised via social networks, both informal and structured. To attend a *Primanotte* itinerant party, for example, one must be registered on a mailing list, which requires being sponsored by a member. According to one of the

organizers, several thousands of people are on this list (Cattan and Clerval, 2011). The parties are, therefore, halfway in between being private and public; organizers take care to maintain this dynamic by filtering visitors carefully. It is therefore evident that, despite the possibility to transcend and challenge the norms of everyday life within the club, social divisions and patterns of interaction regarding gender and class remain powerful.

Given the normative nature of rules regarding access to the space of the club, emotions regarding the submission to the disciplines of the clubs are not always positive. In this sense, the club is not always considered a 'utopian' or 'mythical' island. For example, a self-declared gay male, age 28, proclaimed:

'The club is a private space, the music is incredibly loud – next time I'll bring earplugs – the word is negated, and it's hot. I feel constricted to stay here' (Torino, May 2011).

'And the fact that you have to pay in order just to get a look is also frustrating' (friend, no name declared, same discussion).

Despite the idea of a dichotomy between the inside and the outside, i.e., the land and the sea (using the metaphor of the island), the transition from the outside to the inside of the club may be experienced as the passage through a number of intermediate emotional fields, defining different frontiers rather than a single boundary. In fact, other spatialities have been observed and experienced during the fieldwork. Feeling 'inside' and 'outside' is not always directly linked to one's physical position within the boundary of the club. Staying in front of the entrance of the club is not tantamount to being outside, as it implies a public display of the intention to go inside. In addition, within the club, clubbers commonly display boredom and alienation, e.g., through annoyed expressions or the abundant use of mobile phone messaging, and the researchers sometimes experienced the emotional desire to be elsewhere. In other



words, the emotional space that defines the inside and the outside uses different coordinates that are distinct from material space.

This is not to say that physical space is not intimately connected to the emotional space of gay and lesbian clubbing. The time-space of clubbing is often perceived in a territorially domestic sense. In this case, claims regarding networked individualism, i.e. those showing how new travel and communication technologies can empower individuals to create better relationships and social lives, are strictly linked and complementary to more traditional positions emphasizing the importance of spatial and temporal contexts in strengthening social networks (Clark, 2007). Co-presence, which is a physical relation between people and travel between places, is necessary for making connections (Urry, 2007; Gorman-Murray, 2007 and 2009). In other words, territory and territoriality are central in feeling a sense of belonging and in regards to ephemeral and temporary spaces, as evidenced in the following quotes:

‘I have come here for a long time: I like to think that this is *my* club’ (discussion, 3 April 2011, Turin).

‘*Primanotte* is for me a place where I feel free away from the majority rule, and secure away from the insults or aggressions lesbians are likely to suffer in public space. It is like a sort of *deuxième maison*’ (for a Swiss lesbian that attends very often parties in Paris, February 2011).

Many studies have shown that mobility and migration may represent forms of transgression that are often related to a refusal to social norms. Lesbians, for example, refuse marriage and motherhood, and mobility may thus constitute an inherent part of their sexual identity formation (Falquet, 2011). In the present context, mobility to and from clubs becomes a strategy for emotions and development of the self. Following Knopp (2004), clubbing may be considered a practice of a ‘quest for identity’. Specifically, clubbing entails seeking people,

places, relationships and ways of being that provide physical and emotional security, which are often denied in the heterosexist world. In a similar vein, Chetcuti (2010), analyzing lesbian self-identification in France, discussed how this identification is constructed gradually against the heterosexual norm. Lesbian festive places play a major role in the process of development by becoming 'counter-spaces' or places of emancipation from heteronormative codes and violence.

### ***Where does going out start?***

Going out implies an affective field that starts operating and shaping the surfaces of bodies long before the engagement in the performance of clubbing. The performance manifests in the construction of the idea of going out through organizing a night out with friends, through the dressing and general preparation of the body, and in all of the anticipatory feelings involved (Hubbard, 2005; Jamaingal-Jones et al., 2010).

'I start thinking about the night out from the early morning. Sometimes I organize with days of anticipation' (Turin, May 2011).

'It happens to me to feel quite excited before entering in the club, and to feel bored inside the club' (Paris, April 2011).

The body, preparing for a night out, may be very much inside the emotional space of the club, arguably much more than the body sitting at the margins of a feast and being alienated from the party. Thus, physical co-presence is important, but it is not a necessary and sufficient condition for emotional formations. Moreover, emotional space is not necessarily an island of social ties, friendships, and the sense of community. Rather, emotional space is more abstract through its desire for contact, intimacy with spaces and bodies, and the predisposition towards closeness with the other. The practice of moving to and between clubs is imbued with the

thrill of seeking new experiences and encounters; movement is thus a tactic for seeking emotions.

The space of the club/island and the micro-politics of pleasure in the club have much to do with the visual and aesthetic (Riley et al., 2010). As discussed, the space of the club is often perceived as a locus of relative freedom, distanced from the heteronormative gaze of many daytime environments. The vision of gay and lesbian kisses may be considered highly symbolic, a reificatory event that definitely contributes to territorializing the gay and lesbian space (cf. Blidon, 2008; Cattani and Leroy, 2010). At the same time, the space of the club is imbued with a politics of exaggerated and amplified gestures, symbols, metaphors, and allusions. It is a space between surveillance and the breakaway from surveillance, with a relevant role played by the pleasure of being watched and the desire to exceed.

The aesthetic dimension of the parties, the assemblage of bodies, and the performance of the rituals of clubbing create and transform space and sociabilities, producing a community based not on identity or identification but on the simple co-presence in a particular time-space and the collective submission to specific disciplines. In many cases, the transitory experience of the gay club provides enough room for a transformation of the self and the experimentation of a sensation of communality (cf. Knopp, 2004; Sibalis, 2004). Space reveals fluidity: the emotional space of clubbing, which expands far beyond the boundaries of the club and includes the physical and emotional mobility to and between clubs, is the space for a passionate social performance. Such a space provides intimate space as a consequence of being there or going there, even if the physical basis of the territory fades away at the end of the night.

Meaningfully, one recurrent element in dialogues concerning the reasons why people choose to perform nightclubbing (particularly in the case of people not willing to dance), concerns the expectation to meet someone, testifying to the shaping of the body's surface in the (pre)disposition to meeting the other.

‘Actually, I am here because I hope that I’ll meet new men who I surely will not meet if I stay home. That is why I went out tonight, though I was quite tired’  
(Turin, February, 2011).

The club may be imagined as a mythic island where one may project dreams, expectations, hopes, and the eroticism of the encounter with the other, a feature that is particularly relevant for the world of gays and lesbians, where the sense that the island is disconnected from the rest of the heteronormative world is crucial (Bousiou, 2008). The island is a space for the possible (even if hardly possible) realization of dreams, pleasures, transformation of the self, and contact with existing or idealized others. The simple and actual existence of the possibility of actualizing these expectations produces a very real and tangible space of emotion, an inside completely disconnected from the linear conceptions of geographical distance and proximity.

The space of the club-island is connected to other imagined spaces of freedom, hopes, and dreams, i.e. the various clubs and nights dispersed throughout the city, giving shape to an archipelago of islands that emotionally moves beyond the physical shape of the playscape. Within this perspective, the two cases of Turin and Paris, despite their peculiarities, are not that different. In both cases, we have a discontinuous, polycentric, and ephemeral archipelago of emotional islands where gay and lesbian users embrace nomadism, i.e. the choice to move through ever-changing trajectories in search of ever-changing temporary clubs. This nomadism is a strategy for a complex performance that encompasses emotions, fun, subjectivity, intimacy, and the appropriation of space.

### ***Temporary place of micro-cultures interconnected in networks***

The combination of the search for a sense of territoriality and the practice of moving between

temporary sites of recreation is in line with Maffesoli's classic vision of a world of neo-tribes, which are voluntary, unstable, and sensuous micro-cultures interconnected in networks. Each node represents a possible site of ephemeral belonging for contemporary nomads, each achieving its fullest joyful expression in the frame of a passionate logic (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010; cf. Bell and Binnie, 2000; St John, 2003). However, ideas of fun have to be carefully scrutinized in the emotional perspective, also considering the limits of a linear interpretation of the spoken word as an investigative tool. Consider the following dialogue with a little-known clubber:

C.: 'I like being here because it is different from the external world: here I have the freedom to express and have fun'.

Researcher (having in mind the idea of the 'oceanic feeling'): 'So you feel much tuned with the crowd tonight: are you having fun in this sense?'

C.: 'Well, I do not really feel tuned with all the people: they're so exhibitionists, it is a bit like a parade!'

R.: 'So what's funny with that?'

C.: 'Actually, to tell the truth, I am not really having fun. However, I feel free and I may know people' (Turin, April 2011).

According to a self-declared Parisian lesbian, aged 45 years:

'For me, a lesbian bar is a place to meet and share experiences with other that share the same sexuality than me and also, I can add sometime the same 'perception' of living in a dominant heterosexual world; in the sense that having fun is not the main reason for being here' (Paris, March 2011).

Evidently, asking people if they are having fun is not the best way to investigate the emotional

object of fun. Similar considerations may fit with the idea of being free in the club. This is not to say that the analysis of spoken words is not useful, but straightforward relations between emotions and their representations in discourses have to be taken cautiously.

A number of divergent attitudes and reasons for clubbing have been detected during fieldwork. For instance, some people love dancing, while others hate it, whereas some people love drinking, while others are disgusted by it. At the same time, the co-presence of clubbers produces essential spaces and modes of being together that exist only in the actuality of dancing bodies in the crowd. A number of technologies, machines, and materialities work to enhance the emotional surface of the experience, as the assemblage of body, spirit, loud music, lights, alcohol, images, and gay and lesbian symbols provide an important basis for emotional disposition towards various forms of empathetic sociality. For example, loud music, by making it difficult to speak and to listen, emphasizes the pre-linguistic and pre-cognitive pleasure of sensuous communication. However, this is far from universal within the emotional space of the club; the performance also produces outsiders in the margins, as discussed previously.

For many people, going to a club is not necessarily the construction of an intimate space or participation in a public ritual. The relations between bodies within the club have much to do with our different emotions and with ourselves. For example, embarrassment may emerge in feeling inappropriate, ugly, and awkward in a dancing performance.

‘Actually, I hate dancing. I feel stupid and I keep thinking that I am moving in a ridiculous way. I just dance when it is *necessary*’ (Turin, May 2011).

While such arguments may also apply to the heterosexual performance of clubbing, some peculiarities of the gay and lesbian cases have to be considered. Particularly, by getting inside the club and making contact with the gay or lesbian crowd, it is possible to escape from the

condition of isolation that characterizes many gay men in Turin and lesbian women in Paris living in an unsatisfactory and oppressive heteronormative landscape. Returning to the metaphor of the island, the club may be imagined as an inverted image of the myth of the desert island, i.e. an insulated space where one does not feel alone. In this sense, the co-presence in space and the sensation of feeling the crowd may also assume a political-aesthetic dimension, a sort of grassroots subversion of the idea of isolation and/or being part of a minority and the celebration of the multitude.

‘It is so good to see how many *we* [gays] are here inside’ (discussion, 7 May 2011, Turin)

### ***The metaphorical logic of insularity***

As discussed, the space of the gay or lesbian club is partial, temporary, ephemeral, commercial, and strictly regulated. It disappears at the end of the night, as does an island swallowed by the sea. Additionally, applying the metaphor of the island in a traditional way, the club may represent a sort of material and emotional ghetto for gays and lesbians, as observed from the outside (Sibalis, 2004; Leroy, 2005). However, this is just one part of the story. The clubs may be an important part of the life of a number of users. The network of venues and the movement between clubs does not necessarily imply isolation and separation. For example, traveling to the club contributes to hybridizing categories of straight/gay spaces (Browne and Bakshi, 2011). As the affective space of the club occurs far beyond the space and time of the event, the memories of or dreams for the event may represent a reassuring and repeating emotion, occurring days after/before the feast. Despite its evident limitations and commercial nature, the emotional space of the club, i.e. a repeated island in the proposed metaphor, is very much real, and the emotions enacted in the contact with the clubbing are, in the same way, actual and concrete. Such a vision is connected to the fact that the island, as a

cultural construction, has not been imagined as a fixed and static space. The concept of ‘moving’ and ‘repeating’ islands highlights how island constructions are the result of movement. The ocean’s perpetual movement is radically decentering and resisting attempts to fix a locus of history. The island is defined by its relation with water, an element that lacks fixity and rootedness and emphasizes transiency. Culturally, this is a provocation towards encoding rigid conceptions of culture, class, gender, subjectivity; observed as such, an attempt to reflect on the liquid formations of emotions fits within this metaphor. The inner nature of the two case studies implies an ‘oceanic’ perspective, as nights are as temporary and ephemeral as oceanic tides. Because the contingent emotional space of clubbing spreads far from the boundaries of the club, it subverts the linear and static conceptions of proximity and distance and of here and ‘there’.

The geography of emotions is active in shaping the dreams, myths, expectations, and encounters with the other in the time-space of the club event. Particularly, the inner existence of the club performance is made possible through the geography of emotions; it is the predisposition towards contact, the attitude towards a modification of the self, and the desire to emerge in the emotional field of the club that creates the island. Without emotions, the club would be nothing more than a bounded container for bodies.

## **Conclusion**

This article contributes to the existing literature on clubbing and gender by proposing a specific take on emotions and space and by providing insights on the spatialities of gay and lesbian clubbing in the two case studies of the Paris and Turin gay nightlife scenes. This article does not explore the differences between the scenes of the two cities, but it instead focuses on a shared characteristic of ephemerality. To explore these spaces, this article utilizes the metaphors of the island and the archipelago.

The cases discussed in this article show how lesbians’ visibility in Paris and gay



venues in Turin do not match the traditional conceptions of gay nightlife space, focusing on concretized formations such as the gay village. Gays and lesbians can boast of alternative territorialities, exemplified in the article by the use of the metaphor of the repeated island, which is intended as a temporary assemblage of materiality, emotions and bodies, and limited to certain times in dispersed places in the city. Ephemeral centralities, for one night or a series of one-off events, contribute to specific forms of urbanity and sociality. These islands, on the one hand, contribute to the creation of ‘communities’ that are fragmented, commercial, and exclusive. On the other hand, these islands produce a network of places through which lesbians and gays can negotiate their access to the city and do so beyond the established and visible gay/lesbian district. A central feature of this archipelago configuration of repeated islands is the emphasis placed on movement as a key strategy for seeking emotions. This consideration is in line with the contribution of Knopp (2004), who argued that movement is ontologically connected to emotions.

The aim of the article is not to provide a comprehensively descriptive perspective of the scene. Questions concerning the commercial nature of the venues, the risks within the scene, and the evident practices of discrimination based on class and ethnicity have not been directly addressed here (see Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Boyd, 2010). By focusing on emotions, this article proposes that, in two different cities and in the absence of stable recreational territorialities, repeating islands emerge that offer a potential for gay and lesbian emotional performances and a peculiar spatial formation that hybridizes gay, lesbian and heterosexual spaces in the city.

In the same vein, this article contributes to the exploration of the metaphor of the island in the framework of gay and lesbian social and cultural geographies. Taking inspiration from Brown’s work on the metaphor of the closet, various critiques to monolithic and universalizing narratives of the gay and lesbian island have been proposed. The islands have to be located in the various terrains of gay and lesbian life. The analysis of the emotional

performances giving form to recreational ‘islands’ shows that the island is not just a linguistic metaphor, but it is also a material space. Movement to and from clubs and bars may be considered the material expression of ‘traveling to the islands’, intended in this article as a sort of emotional quest. Because developing metaphors is an important way to open multiple analytical perspectives (Noxolo et al., 2008), the metaphor of the repeated island may represent a useful conceptual tool for further investigations into the gendered emotional geographies of various phenomena. Particularly, the current analysis may help develop further theoretical reflections on the nexus between gender, movement and emotions.

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### **Notes**

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1. <http://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/In-The-Northwest-Seattle-is-an-island-in-its-1154555.php> (cons. 23 August 2012).
  2. In this case, unlike other rites of passage, the rite is ephemeral and limited to the specific time-space of the event, disappearing when the person reenters society (cf. Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010).

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